

News from Ed Markey

United States Congress Massachusetts Seventh District

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE CONTACT: DAVID MOULTON

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"UNIFORM POLL CLOSING" BILL

RE-INTRODUCED IN HOUSE

REPS. MARKEY (D-MA), TAUZIN (R-LA)

JOIN FORCES TO ADDRESS MAJOR PERENNIAL WEAKNESS

IN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

Washington, DC: Two key House leaders combined forces yesterday to eliminate a major weakness, exposed once again in the 2000 presidential election, in the way we conduct nationwide presidential elections. Reps. Edward Markey (D-MA) and W. J. "Billy" Tauzin (R-LA), Chairman of the House Commerce Committee, introduced a bipartisan bill, "H.R. 50", that would require polling places to close at the same time in all 50 states in presidential election years, so that news organizations could report election results without influencing votes still being cast where polls had not yet closed.

A recent CBS poll reports that 71% of the American public would like to see a uniform national poll closing time established. A bill identical to H.R. 50 was introduced in the Senate by Senator Ted Stevens (D-AK) in the last Congress, and is expected to be reintroduced in the Senate shortly.

"The concern about the media influencing the outcome of elections, rather than just reporting the outcome, is both bipartisan and bicoastal," Rep. Markey noted. "Regardless of geography, both Democrats and Republicans have reason to believe that the behavior of voters has, in both the 2000 election and earlier ones, been altered by incomplete reporting based on staggered poll closings."

"This legislation is an important first step toward restoring faith in our electoral system," Chairman Tauzin said. "Under our plan, the media -- once again -- would simply report the outcome of presidential elections, not predict them."

This year, many voters were angered when the networks projected Al Gore the victor in Florida, prior to the closing of polls in the Florida Panhandle, and the 'likely' victors in key Presidential battleground

states were declared while the polls remained elsewhere. Markey and Tauzin are proposing the following steps to eliminate the problem:

- o For Presidential elections, polls in all 50 states would close at 9 p.m. eastern standard time, which is 8 p.m. central standard time and 7 p.m. mountain time.
- o In the Pacific time zone, in Presidential election years only, in order to achieve a 7 p.m. poll closing time, daylight savings time would be extended for two weeks until after the election.
- o Allow Hawaii and Alaska to open their polls early, on Monday afternoon, so that they are not disadvantaged by closing early on Tuesday to comply with the new nationwide uniform poll closing time.

Additional information can be found at www.house.gov/Markey.

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